

Lesson 3

Setting and Mood

The **setting** is the **time** and the **place** in which the action of a story takes place. Often, the author states where and when the story takes place. At other times, you have to use details to figure out the setting. The setting can create a certain **mood** or atmosphere. A story set in a garden on a fine day could help create an upbeat mood, while an abandoned house on a stormy night might suggest a fearful mood.



Tips for Success

- Remember that the setting includes both the time and the place.
- Look for details that express the mood or atmosphere.
- Determine how the setting affects the characters or the events of the plot.

As you read the following excerpt from a story, think about the setting and how it affects the mood of the story.

At Santa Ysabel del Mar the season was at one of those moments when the air rests quiet over land and sea. The old breezes were gone; the new ones were not yet risen. The flowers in the mission garden opened wide; no wind came by day or night to shake the loose petals from their stems. Along the basking, silent, many-colored shore gathered and lingered the crisp odors of the mountains. The dust hung golden and motionless . . . and the Pacific lay like a floor of sapphire, whereon to walk beyond the setting sun into the East. One white sail shone there. Instead of an hour, it had been from dawn till afternoon in sight between the short headlands; and the Padre had hoped that it might be the ship his homesick heart awaited. But it had slowly passed. From an arch in his garden cloisters, he was now watching the last of it. Presently it was gone, and the great ocean lay empty.

—Owen Wister, "Padre Ignacio"

- Which statement BEST describes the setting and mood of the passage?
 - The setting, a beautiful beachfront garden in the present day, creates a mood of optimism and joy.
 - The setting, a deserted beach on a winter day, suggests a mood of fear.
 - The setting, a windless day at a Pacific coast mission some time ago, creates a sad mood of longing.
 - The setting, a sailboat off the California coast in recent years, creates a mood of suspense.

1. ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D



Mark your answer choice by filling in the oval.

Now check to see whether you chose the correct answer.

- The mood is not optimistic and the time does not seem to be the present.
- Nothing suggests that it is winter, and the mood is sad but not fearful.
- This is the correct answer. The sailing ship and the Padre suggest the story is not set in the present. The weather and the Padre's homesickness create a sense of longing.
- Although a sailing ship is mentioned, the action is not set on one.

Test Practice

Read these opening paragraphs of the short story "To Build a Fire" by Jack London. As you read, pay attention to the story details.

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth bank, where a dim and little-traveled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun or hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun. . . .

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of

sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a *chechaquo*, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general . . . Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. . . .

1. (A) (B) (C) (D)
2. (A) (B) (C) (D)
3. (A) (B) (C) (D)

Mark the best answer for questions 1–3.

1. The setting in this story is
 - A. in a small cabin.
 - B. along the banks of a river.
 - C. out on the frozen sea ice.
 - D. on a trail through a forest.
2. The sun is not shining because the story is set
 - A. at nighttime.
 - B. during a snowstorm.
 - C. in the far north.
 - D. on a cloudy day.
3. In general, the details about the setting create what type of mood?
 - A. upbeat
 - B. relaxed
 - C. gloomy
 - D. frustrated
4. Based on the man's attitude toward the setting, predict what might happen.
